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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000795

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/S, DRL
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR JFRAZER
LONDON FOR C. GURNEY
PARIS FOR C. NEARY
NAIROBI FOR T. PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/24/2013

TAGS: ECON ELAB PGOV ZI

SUBJECT: STAYAWAY, DAY TWO: NO BUSINESS, AS USUAL

REF: A. HARARE 779

¶B. HARARE 550

Classified By: Laboff KRBel for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The second day of the ZCTU-called stayaway continued with widespread industrial shutdown, many banks closed, and more shops and grocery stores closed than Wednesday. The GOZ seems determined to find a scapegoat that minimizes public support, claiming that the ZCTU has paid transport operators to abandon their regular routes. Conflicting reports abound, but labor sources indicate that they will not renew a call for an indefinite stayaway, but will instead support the MDC when it renews calls in May for a nationwide mass action. End summary.

Participation Remains High

¶2. (SBU) A quick tour through industrial Harare indicated that businesses continued with a 70-90% shutdown rate (ref a). Banks remained closed, for the most part, and many more shops and grocery stores were locked. One press report stated that infamous "labor leader" (and defeated Zanu-PF candidate for Parliament) Joseph Chinotimba personally intervened with a clothing store in downtown Harare, first forcing the owner to open his shop, and later arresting the owner for not keeping his business open. The GOZ-controlled media has also claimed that the ZCTU paid transport operators up to Zim \$50,000 each to buy their cooperation and compensate them for lost business in an effort to prevent workers from reaching their jobs.

Rumors of Continuation Not Confirmed

¶3. (C) One local businessman reports that the ZCTU has called for an additional four days of stayaway next week, from April 29 through May 2 -- and encompassing the May 1st Labor Day holiday. However, we have received no corroboration from labor contacts. By contrast, the Solidarity Center rep reports that the stayaway will end as of COB on Friday, and states that workers will report as usual from Saturday onwards. This contact also stated that the ZCTU intended this stayaway as an opening salvo, and will now concentrate its efforts on coordinating with the MDC in future mass actions scheduled for early May. Additionally, MDC sources have previously indicated that they would not be ready for a renewed call for mass action before May 5, possibly as late as May 13. Although they may now intend to capitalize on the momentum generated by the ZCTU's action, we have had no independent corroboration of such a plan.

GOZ Attempts to Spin the Situation

¶4. (SBU) The GOZ has been desperately attempting to pre-empt further public mass action through concession, coercion, and confusion. The GOZ-controlled press published stories of new, reduced transport fees (with a maximum price of Zim \$300 one-way) on the second day of the stayaway. The GOZ also coupled this story with public threats of revocation of licenses should transport operators fail to ply their assigned routes. Today, on the third and final day of the stayaway, the headlines trumpet newly announced minimum wages, reportedly negotiated between government and businesses under the Tripartite Negotiating Forum (TNF), despite the fact that labor -- the third party -- has publicly disavowed further participation. In its statement calling for the stayaway, the ZCTU publicly blasted the GOZ for raising the fuel price unilaterally outside of the TNF process (ref a) and announced that the previously negotiated minimum wages had "been overtaken by events on the ground" and were no longer adequate. Now, the GOZ is hailing the

"negotiated" minimum wage as a triumph for workers -- at levels agreed (but not signed into law) as early as March (ref b), well before fuel was raised by 300%.

Comment

15. (C) The ZCTU seems to be drawing strength from the widespread support of this call for mass action. We have received some reports of labor leaders being arrested in Bulawayo, and some national ZCTU leaders are reportedly in hiding ahead of rumored Harare arrests. The potential for massive retaliation remains a real threat, with Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo calling for criminal and civil penalties against labor union officials under the draconian Public Order and Security Act, which has given the GOZ great leeway for arrest and detention of opposition leaders. Given the widespread shutdown of businesses, it will be difficult for the GOZ to spin this stayaway as a failure. The combined efforts of both labor and the MDC in future calls to action will increase political and economic pressure on the GOZ.

SULLIVAN